

Soviet Foreign Policy and Conflict Resolution in the Third World: The Nicaraguan Civil War

by
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The resolution of Third World conflicts was an essential part and a barometer of the superpower detente of 1985-91. Perhaps the most successful example of mutual participation in conflict resolution was the Nicaraguan case. Here a combination of superpower negotiation, regional peace packages, and acceptance of the results of the elections in February 1990, in Nicaragua resulted in the end of civil war and outside interference in Nicaragua. Much of the course of this exercise in conflict resolution is a matter of public record.¹ However, what is not altogether clear is the Soviet political perspective and policy process that led, at the time, to this successful exercise in superpower partnership.

This is to say that most analyses of Soviet policy in Central America stress Moscow's bilateral relationship with Managua, using rational actor models of a single state actor relating to another single state actor or else stress the superpower dimension, namely that the USSR viewed Nicaragua and its problems mainly through the prism of its effect on relations with the US and the American geostrategic position. While these approaches have merit, they do not tell the whole story. Accounts of the US-Soviet negotiations reveal that there were splits within the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the policy.² By the same token, the turn to the right in Soviet politics in 1990-91, culminating in the failed coup of August, 1991, revealed a continuing debate between forces more or less sympathetic to Fidel Castro and, by implication the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, within the Soviet foreign policy community.³

Therefore, single actor approaches to the problem obscure the differences among Soviet analysts and decision-makers, and conceal points of leverage brought to bear in this process by the other interested parties, namely Nicaragua and Cuba. Greater attention to this three-cornered, if obviously asymmetrical, debate over the period 1979-90 contributes to a better understanding of the environment within which Moscow perceived the Nicaraguan conflict and its fluctuating goals there.

For example, it appears that the Sandinista government from the start was committed to the "revolution without borders" in Central America, and viewed its example as one that should trigger a general uprising there. That commitment grew out of the government's own ideology as well as a shrewd appreciation of what it took to win Moscow's support and assistance. Within days of their victory Moscow sent the Sandinistas a delegation to assess possibilities for cooperation with them. Also in 1979, the KGB recognized Central America's significance for future subversive operations.⁴ Nicaragua's commitment to a Leninist domestic and foreign policy undoubtedly was based, at least in part, on its own awareness of the

points made by Grenada's ambassador to the USSR that if Grenada (Nicaragua) was to be helped materially it had to demonstrate consistency in applying Leninist solutions in domestic politics and economics at home and display unwavering support for the Soviet line abroad. This support had to appear as taking the lead in influencing regional developments in the Caribbean (Central America).⁵ Armed support for the revolution abroad not only satisfied Sandinista emotional and ideological ambitions, it also was the test for Soviet bloc cooperation. And a second criterion of such assistance was Castro's strong support for the Sandinistas, whom he esteemed for their willingness to make the revolution and spread it abroad.⁶ Arguably Castro and the Soviet governments of 1979-85 saw Central America as a place of opportunity, and were also committed by their own sense of responsibility to contest the United States where it threatened "states of socialist orientation" whose policies had demonstrated that they "leaned to one side" and supported Moscow.⁷

At the same time neither Castro nor the Sandinistas were content merely to take dictation from Moscow. Sandinista leaders were adamant about this point throughout their tenure in office.⁸ And Castro's independence needs no comment here. Both Cuba and Nicaragua after 1979 placed a strong emphasis on "exporting the revolution." Both saw this as their role in the anti-American struggle and counselled a more aggressive program of assistance for Nicaragua and revolutionaries like the FMLN in El Salvador. During 1979-83, such views enjoyed some support among Soviet policy makers, but clearly Soviet perceptions were internally and institutionally divided. By no means did support for a forward revolutionary policy in Central America enjoy universal favor.

Any examination of Soviet academic and political commentary on Latin America, and more specifically Nicaragua and Central America during 1979-90, immediately encounters the great diversity in opinions and outlooks among analysts and decision-makers on the issues involved in Soviet relations with these states and movements.⁹ These differences did not occur merely within the Soviet environment; that is, they depended upon competing perceptions of the context (mainly American reaction but also including Latin American reactions) within which those relationships take place. Sergo Mikoyan's observations concerning policy in 1990 are even more apposite for the late Brezhnev era.

U.S. analysts mislead themselves when they believe that there are no important obstacles in the Soviet Union to a radical reversal of Soviet foreign policy. In the modern, pluralistic Soviet society there are articulate and dynamic sectors that do not support concessions or unilateral actions in arms reductions. Their opposition to new thinking in foreign policy is linked openly to a sometimes aggressive repudiation of the domestic aspects of Perestroika such as democratization, Glasnost, de-Stalinization, and radical economic reforms. It would be a mistake to ignore their influence on the masses, trade unions, and those many apparatchiks and military personnel who fear their jobs may be eliminated as a result of arms reduction.¹⁰

Mikoyan also contended, contrary to much American Sovietological research, that the Brezhnev team had no strategy for Latin American policy, particularly Nicaragua. Moreover, when it did become clear that a pro-Soviet regime would come to power there, control over Soviet policy lay in the hands of the International Department (ID) of the Central committee led by Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomar'ev, inveterate Stalinists whose politics were, in Mikoyan's words, "malicious, vengeful," and "incompetent."¹¹ Once it became obvious that Nicaragua really was a front of opposition to American regional policy and a source of support for other local revolutionaries, the ID went into action along with the military assistance program and the KGB to give substantial assistance to Nicaragua and El Salvador's FMLN. Thus the escort of the latter's Jorge Shafik Handal, on his trip through the bloc looking for arms aid in 1980-81, was the high ranking ID official Karen Brutents. Ponomar'ev even gave official voice to the extolling of the revolutionary path in Central America, thereby vindicating Cuban assertions of the 1960s and enhancing Castro's standing in the Soviet policy process. In articles written in *World Marxist Review* and *Kommunist* during 1980-81, Ponomar'ev praised the Nicaraguan revolution as a "major success" and referred in general to the appearance of "states of socialist orientation" in Asia, Africa, and Central America. This formulation apparently included Grenada, which by 1983 was privately referred to in similar terms by Soviet officials. Also in 1983, a Soviet press article referred explicitly to Nicaragua in a similar way.¹²

Military officials like Marshal Ogarkov, Chief of the General Staff, also endorsed Nicaragua's and Grenada's efforts to obtain Soviet military aid and export the revolution. As Ogarkov told Grenada's Army Chief of Staff in 1983,

The United States would try now and in the future to make things difficult for progressive changes in all regions and continents. The Marshal said that over two decades ago, there was only Cuba in Latin America, today there are Nicaragua, Grenada, and a serious battle is going on in El Salvador. The Marshal of the Soviet Union then stressed that United States imperialism would try to prevent progress but there were no prospects for imperialism to turn back history.¹³

Ogarkov's remarks indicate that for Moscow what was central was the geopolitical and global anti-American campaign and that Nicaragua and Grenada were important to Moscow mainly in this connection. Thus the importance of revolution in Central America also appears to have been, for leading policy makers, if not analysts, a function of the state of Soviet-American relations at the time.

Similarly, Nicaragua was rated then as more important than Grenada because it was under attack from the US and had already proven itself as a reliable partner for Moscow. According to Roger Miranda's 1987 revelations, by 1983 a secret Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan plan to upgrade Nicaragua's military potential was already being implemented. US support for the Contras and its evident determination to crush the Sandinista regime had only heightened Soviet concerns that Nicaragua be able to defend itself. In this sense Soviet statements in 1983-84 that

it would support Nicaragua politically to the best of its capability and communiques from meetings with Nicaraguan President Ortega that Moscow was confident Nicaragua could defend itself must be seen as more than a disinclination to challenge US power directly in Central America. Those statements also showed Moscow's hope of making Nicaragua self-sufficient or a least sufficiently difficult for the United States to attack, let alone win. In other words Soviet policy was a form, albeit very limited, of extending deterrence to Managua.

Though Brezhnev told Raul Castro in the early 1980s that it could not fight in Cuba because "it is 11,000 KM away" and "if we go there we'll get our heads smashed," that was not the whole story.¹⁴ Moscow would continue to supply the arms it had arranged for but no more because not later than 1983 it realized that upgrading arms supplies beyond the limits it had set for itself and Managua could provoke the US into attempting a Grenada type operation there. That operation was widely reported to have caused divisions between Moscow and Havana over the issue of support for foreign revolutionaries and 1984-85 was a low point in these states' mutual relations.

In retrospect it appears that Grenada, along with upgraded support for anti-Communist insurgencies in Angola, Cambodia, and Afghanistan during 1983-86 ultimately helped induce a change in Soviet thinking about regional conflicts in the Third World in general and Nicaragua in particular, because the Soviet perspective on US-Soviet relations also changed then. During the early 1980s, the Soviet view on regional conflicts in the Third World was one that saw conflict with pro-Western and US forces in starkly competitive terms. These were zero-sum contests where one side's gain was the other's loss. Soviet aggressiveness was displayed to the extent that US or pro-US forces were seen to have credible and thus deterrent military forces on hand.

This credible deterrence was a prerequisite for any effort to solve a particular conflict (since general solutions were ruled out) and conversely its absence precluded Soviet interest in reducing regional tensions. Another way of saying this is that Moscow thought it could push forward in the Third World without meeting serious resistance from the United States. The Grenada invasion certainly changed the equation in Central America and the Caribbean and influenced Soviet thinking.¹⁵ Their thinking also remained strongly attached to ideological conceptions that Third World radicals who called themselves socialists merited support as long as they conformed to the criteria above.

This ideologically driven policy made cooperation with the US almost impossible and led Moscow into a trap whereby it missed the connection between regional conflicts and the Reagan Administration's hostility to Moscow. Local conflicts or wars were no longer risk-free; if anything they magnified the military tensions in the world and could have lead to a war where Moscow was dragged into a conflict to protect a state that was marginal to its vital interests, eg, Nicaragua.

Moscow only gradually came to realize the danger it was running in Nicaragua. After 1983 it adopted a more defensive posture whereby the goals for

the area became securing the Sandinista government and secondly, running no risk of directly provoking the Reagan Administration. After all, by invading Grenada the latter had served notice that it might go further than destabilizing the Sandinistas by supporting the Contras. Since the Latin American revolution had turned out to be a chimera and the area was important only insofar as it detracted from American power abroad, high risks were ruled out. On the other hand, Moscow was now to some degree committed to defending the Sandinista regime and could not walk away from the Reagan challenge there. Therefore, Moscow stepped up military and economic aid from 1983-88. Even though Moscow's disinclination to run risks in 1984-85 aroused Castro's displeasure this policy continued and served increasingly to undermine the Soviet bloc's consensus for exporting conflicts into the Third World.

For the Soviet Union to make changes in its policy toward Nicaragua and Central America it first had to change its policy toward Washington. Along with that change it also had to revise its outlook on Third World regional conflicts. This process occurred in 1984-89 and comprised an ideological shift to the "new thinking," and substantive institutional changes in the policy making agencies for both the Third World and the United States and fundamental changes in actual policy.

These changes did not take place as simply as it appeared to Western analysts. Indeed, a more contradictory process than seemed to be the case was at work in the overall Soviet approach to resolving regional conflicts, Nicaragua included. The institutional changes in the Foreign Ministry and the International Department were not just due to Gorbachev's rethinking of Third World or Latin American policy in general, or did they come about solely because he desired to place his men in key positions to carry out his policies. Rather, the evolving approach to conflicts in Latin America, Asia, and Africa contributed to the process. Shevardnadze replaced Gromyko at the Foreign Ministry and Dobrynin took over from the octogenarian Ponomarev at the ID. Suslov had died in 1982 and nobody really replaced him as the party's oracle on Marxist revolutions abroad. Foreign policy appointments to ambassadorial positions in key states like Brazil, Cuba, and Nicaragua were numerous with two ambassadorial changes in each case occurring between 1985 and 1988 and more since then. These appointments went to party loyalists, apparatchiki, and professional diplomats, often Americanists. As a result, Soviet embassies and Foreign Ministry desks were now staffed by people who understood US sensitivities to Central American developments and/or could be counted on to influence Soviet policy with a view both to Washington and Latin American states. At the same time, the party apparatchiki could be expected to impose party discipline upon Cuba, Nicaragua, and Latin American parties.¹⁶

Dobrynin likewise reoriented the ID toward more concern for US reactions to policy and also provided an opportunity for the dominance of the view of one of its leading Third World experts, Karen Brutents, regarding Soviet policy. Brutents harbored little optimism concerning the prospects of so-called states of socialist orientation. He saw most Third World countries choosing a capitalist or neo-

capitalist affiliation with the world economy. Pro-Soviet states were economically retrogressive and plagued by insurgencies, many of which stemmed not only from Washington's machinations but from their own efforts to rush unthinkingly into copying the Soviet model. Their very vulnerability made them susceptible to Western pressures to vacillate in their foreign policies and made them less than optimal allies of the USSR. Brutents' suggestions pointed at a diversification of Soviet policy toward amicable relations with all states willing to do so, even capitalist states which were struggling against American economic or political interests as in Latin America. By building such relationships Moscow could create a wider circle of relationships with Latin America and secure its more traditional objectives of increased trade and political influence within an environment that was in any case not conducive to revolutionary offensives.¹⁷

This restructuring of the ID not only led to increased skepticism about the socialist proclivities of states like Sandinista Nicaragua, but also to a curbing of Soviet support for revolutionary adventures. Since 1985, the main emphasis of its activity was to mobilize popular forces on behalf of the Soviet peace program and detente developed between 1987-90, and to support Soviet diplomacy and nonviolent political actions at home.

This policy did not sit well with Latin American revolutionaries, including the Nicaraguans, Cubans, and other Marxist parties. Their resistance to these ideas can be found in statements and policies during the middle and late 1980s. Former President Luis Alberto Monge of Costa Rica observed with reference to the Sandinistas that,

I had four difficult years with them [1982-86]. Their idea was to provoke a crisis internally with strikes and invasion of land. With their army their intention was to control all of Central America. They were not going to invade but to create a conflagration internally.¹⁸

Cuban official opinion also was fundamentally opposed to the basic thrust of Soviet policy's reorientation to the resolution of conflicts in the Third World together with the lessening of tensions with the US. For instance, Cuban Foreign Minister Malmierca returned from the 1989 Nonaligned Countries' Summit Conference and issued the following assessment:

It is true that there are those who believe that if there is a certain alleviation of the tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, that there is a certain detente between East and West, it must be an element to keep in mind the expression of positions by the countries of the Nonaligned Movement. We, on other occasions, have reiterated, and we can do it again now, that we must not suppose—there is no indication sign which permits us to believe in this—that Detente between East and West also implies detente between North and South.¹⁹

In a similar fashion, many Latin American Communists asserted that Washington had not given up its campaign of low-intensity warfare that they regarded as an integrated strategy of total warfare against them, and approvingly cited Castro's observations that detente with Moscow is seen in Washington as providing license for further imperialist adventures against Third World and Latin American states. In March 1989, an Argentinean Communist could write in *World Marxist Review*, the journal of the ID, that,

The record shows that the victory of national and social liberation depends, firstly, on active involvement of the masses and the unity of the working class, poorer peasants and progressive intellectuals and, secondly, on organization and the readiness to use any form of struggle.²⁰

However, Gorbachev's appointments to key positions affecting Central American policy during 1985-88 did not necessarily signify a willingness to resolve the Nicaraguan conflict in the manner that eventually occurred. In fact, the widespread expectation on the part of American Sovietologists that Gorbachev would immediately cut back aid and military assistance to pro-Soviet regimes in the Third World — because their systems and his were undergoing visibly severe crises — was wholly misplaced. Quite the opposite happened until the Soviet economy failed and its East European satellites were no longer available to take up the slack as they had done in the 1970s and 1980s. According to US officials, Soviet aid to Nicaragua's government in 1989 was 80 percent of 1988's even though aid to the Contras declined to almost nothing. Meanwhile, aid to other embattled Communist states like Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Vietnam increased substantially,²¹ and during 1985 Soviet-backed forces launched offensives in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan (the last being the most brutal phase of the Soviet involvement in the war and lasted well into 1986). These offensives lasted several years in some cases, notably Angola's, and were accompanied by Soviet threats to destabilize Pakistan if US aid to the Contras continued.²²

Thus it can fairly be said that during 1983-87 a growing debate took place within the Soviet policy making elite — Politburo, ID, the Armed Forces, and the Institutes — concerning the range of issues bound up with Third World regional conflicts in general and Central America in particular. However, Gorbachev's institutional changes, though potentially helpful to the cause of de-ideologization of foreign policy and the search for a solvent policy based on joint conflict resolution with Washington, had not yet conceptually broken through the cobwebs of "old thinking." While the debate was joined, actual policy was torn by conflicting impulses.

It was only in 1987-88 that the impasse in Soviet policy toward regional conflicts, particularly in Central America, broke up. This trend may be attributed to at least four developments that opened the door to a change in thinking and, subsequently, in policy. First was the success of negotiations on Afghanistan, the most important of these conflicts for Moscow and the most vital in terms of Soviet

security. The increasing likelihood of a negotiated superpower solution there, as in the INF treaty process, strengthened the hands of those who argued that negotiation with the US on vital security issues, with the end of strengthening both sides' mutual security, was viable and productive for the USSR. Soviet officials and commentators explicitly stated that the process by which agreement in Afghanistan's case was negotiated could serve as a model for resolving other conflicts.

The second and third causes for the breakthrough toward progress on Central America were the ascendancy of Shevardnadze and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the policy process over the ID and those arguing for more military support for Nicaragua. That ascendancy was linked to the rise and dissemination of new thinking and its tenets concerning regional conflict in the Third World. As numerous accounts indicate, Shevardnadze's and the MFA's rise were a result of the acceptance of the new thinking. The fourth cause was the growing possibility of winning concrete economic and political benefits in Latin America as a whole thanks to the new way of viewing the continent that derived from new thinking. What made those opportunities real was Central and South American states' intervention through the Contadora process, the two Esquipulas accords, and the Arias plan, by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica to resolve the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Even former military hawks and leaders of the ID, like Brutents, accepted the principles involved in the new thinking once it became clear they could enhance Soviet security.

Evgeni Dolgopolov, a prominent advocate of the "international mission" of the Soviet armed forces under Brezhnev, for example, outlined a process for resolving such conflicts. First, dialogue between the combatants (or their superpower patrons) would begin with the good offices of the UN or some other neutral intermediary, eg, regional groups like ASEAN in Southeast Asia or the Contadora group. Second was the withdrawal of foreign troops, balanced by guarantees to the country(ies) involved. Third were political guarantees jointly assured by the superpowers and the UN. Finally, the military provisions of the agreement stipulated an agreed process and timetable for withdrawal of foreign troops, technicians, foreign military aid, and demilitarization of the belligerents.²³

In a television interview in early 1988, Brutents and then Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov listed four universal principles that might be embodied in the process of resolving such conflicts. Brutents stated that there must be respect for the interests of all involved — the balance of interests of all participants, the states involved must be able to define their interests in "a sovereign way," these problems must not be viewed exclusively in terms of superpower rivalry, and international solutions, perhaps involving the UN, could protect accords from demagogues on all sides.²⁴ Subsequent Soviet suggestions, by both officials and Institutchiki offering their recommendations, built upon these principles. The most outstanding example is that of Evgeni Primakov who offered what must be regarded as an official perspective in 1988.

Primakov underscored the new realization that regional conflicts imperiled the US-Soviet relationship without adding necessarily to Moscow's security. That situation forced Moscow, therefore, to reflect more precisely upon exporting revolution or Americans exporting counterrevolution abroad. This process was also one that its allies had to go through; an obvious hint to Nicaragua, among others, that its requests for endless aid and arms was not necessarily in Moscow's interests or theirs as seen from Moscow. However, the USSR maintained its firm support for a policy against the export of counterrevolution to countries where "progressive forces have come to power."²⁵ Primakov also stated that it was first necessary to reduce the transfer of arms to combatants in these conflicts at the same time as progress in resolving political issues occurred.²⁶ This coincided with the analysis of Brutents and Dolgoplov. Primakov went on from there to advance a series of points that were conducive to ending a Third world conflict peacefully.

First, since there is no such thing as a purely internal civil war isolated from the international rivalries of the superpowers, the USSR had to strive to withdraw the "extra-national" element from these conflicts. Once that happened chances for conflict resolution improved. Second, national reconciliation was the only acceptable platform by which to obtain the participation of neighboring interested states like the Contadora group and was a real option for terminating the domestic bases of conflict. Third, to moderate the intrusion of external influence a kind of "code of conduct" or "rules of conduct" for the superpowers should be negotiated. They should stop using these wars either as reasons or as pretexts for increasing their military presence in these areas because that is precisely how these wars got entangled in the superpower rivalry.²⁷

Carefully examined, Primakov's proposals indicated that Moscow would no longer inject its own or Cuban troops in Soviet platforms into new conflicts. Second, it would defend pro-Soviet regimes under attack by continuing high levels of military and other forms of aid. But at the same time it would encourage these states to fashion national reconciliation programs, eg, elections or coalitions that would moderate domestic tensions within them. Moscow undoubtedly believed that such moves would ease internal stresses while leaving the substance of power in its clients' hands. Third, it would seek to involve all the relevant players in the conflict resolution process.

In this case the various Central and Latin American states' efforts to mediate the conflict corresponded with this tactic. The object of this "solicitation" was to encourage these states to solve, as far as possible, regional issues while phasing out superpower military influence. Yet at the same time, since Moscow was fully involved politically, it would have a legitimate standing as a "dialogue partner" in any further resolution of regional security issues. In Nicaragua's case this program was fully compatible with the emerging view, licensed by Brutents, of what Soviet policy toward the Hispanic American world should be.

Fourth, the USSR needed a lasting and stable conflict resolution process with the United States that would jointly limit arms transfers to belligerent states as well

as other hostile policies. This conflict regime would entail substantial UN monitoring, inspection, and treaty verification. The extreme example of this was the UN's planned takeover of Cambodia, an example that unfortunately has not yet succeeded.²⁸

As these views toward conflict resolution gathered prominence at home, and proved themselves in negotiations over Afghanistan, Angola, and in the INF treaty, they provided an intellectual platform for revising views on Latin America in general and this conflict in particular. More precisely, nonrevolutionary views of Soviet policy desiderata for Latin America gained prominence because the balance of forces inside the Soviet government had swung away from the Ponomarev-Suslov view to emphasize trade, classical diplomacy, and the adjustment of mutually congruent political positions on behalf of Soviet state interests.

This process in general is taken to have signified the deideologization of Soviet foreign policy. And in the Central American situation these global principles were, over the course of time, regionalized and operationalized in Soviet foreign policy. Thus new thinkers, as they began to make their voices heard in policy during 1985-90, advanced several principles pertinent to both the conflict in and around Nicaragua and to Latin America at large. These analysts saw the conflict in Central America as one that prolonged Soviet-American tension as well as the crisis in Central America, which had no end in sight.

Second, their diagnosis of the roots of this regional crisis pointed to the primacy of socioeconomic causes, the answer to which was a profound economic restructuring of Nicaragua and its neighbors. Nor did the growing Soviet economic crisis augur well for continued copying of that example in Central America. Third, Reagan's program of military support for the Contras faced strong opposition at home and abroad. If Moscow wanted to ensure that the Sandinistas remained in power, it should therefore address itself not to prolonging the war by arms supplies, but to helping to solve problems of democratization in Nicaragua to reduce American pressure. The fourth point was that the policy of arms transfers aggravated an already dangerous situation regionally and increased American threat perceptions, which these scholars acknowledged to be real, not fictitious, obstacles.

Fifth came the argument on economic grounds. This not only stressed the costly burden on the USSR, it also tied that high level of Soviet bloc economic and military assistance to undesirable trends within Nicaragua. In the words of one analyst,

Recognizing that one of the strongest arguments used by the Reagan Administration to gain support for its policies was the shift toward the Cuban model of development for Nicaragua, and anticipating possible future heavy demands on Soviet aid programs, it was believed that Soviet efforts to propel a socialist reconstruction of Nicaragua should be halted. The Sandinistas seemed quite satisfied with their wartime economy as a means to cover their incompetence in economic policies

and were seen as increasingly likely to demand ever higher levels of scarce Soviet foreign aid. Moreover, a Soviet Union in political paralysis and economic decay hardly had the moral authority or practical knowledge to tutor the Nicaraguans in economics.²⁹

Therefore, these analysts reasoned that Moscow should terminate military aid to Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador and allow Latin American countries to craft their own solution to these conflicts. Failure to do so risked a constant exacerbation of Soviet-American tensions due to regional events.³⁰

These recommendations became embodied in a broader set of principles that Soviet scholars and officials claimed came to govern Soviet policy. First is the fact that the primacy of global and human interests in foreign policy dictates that no aspect of Soviet policy toward Latin America contradict that requirement. In practice, this took the form of diplomatic and political campaigns for peace, disarmament, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and so on, which took precedence over other interests. Arms sales too had to be limited and hopefully curtailed by both unilateral and multilateral measures.

Second, Latin Americans should be free to decide their own fate without superpower interference. Latin American revolutions would be evaluated, not from the standpoint of superpower geopolitical interests, but from that of the people involved. Therefore, Moscow must abstain from intervening either for or against purely domestic affairs of third countries. It should be noted that this "self-denying ordinance" should also, accordingly, have applied to Washington and its proclivities to intervene in Latin America, eg, against Noriega in Panama. Third, should violent conflict break out in Latin America between states, every effort should be made to resolve it peacefully through the UN or the OAS. Neither direct nor indirect superpower intervention should occur. Economic development had to take place on behalf of the constructive resolution of the debt and other problems of Latin American economics. While Moscow's role here was perforce secondary, nonetheless, its sympathies clearly lay with the poor.

Fourth, the new political thinking by no means presupposed a break with Cuba. Moscow could not simply erase 30 years of friendship with Cuba. On the other hand, the relationship should not simply stand still but should be changed by Moscow on the basis of the new thinking, *Perestroika*, and *Glasnost*. Fifth, the Soviet Union was ready to enter into productive diplomatic and economic relations with all countries in Latin America who would not use those relations against the "rights and aspirations of the people of these countries."

Sixth, special attention should be paid to those states who were willing to conclude mutually beneficial economic exchanges with the USSR. The Soviets would continue to develop close ties with their traditional trading partners in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. And the departure of the Pinochet government removed obstacles to normalization and development of similar ties with Chile. Seventh, the USSR was prepared to cooperate with the United States to define rules regulating arms transfers to the

region and guarantee any treaty that might result. Eighth, it attached great importance to Central American governments' newly developed potential for conflict resolution and supported diplomatic negotiations to end conflicts.³¹

While these points represented a considerable advance over past policies, it must also be noted that deideologization of foreign policies did not terminate the pursuit of Soviet interests. As these policies developed gradually over several years it is clear that Moscow sought mainly to ensure the survival of a reformed but secure pro-Soviet regime in Nicaragua. Soviet analysts, and undoubtedly Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, like their alter egos in the US, likely expected the Sandinistas to win any election, particularly as they controlled the rules of that election. Second, Moscow hoped that by supporting these principles and policies it could secure a legitimate role in Central America, as it tried to do elsewhere in other regional crises, as a legitimate participant in defining security arrangements. In other words, here as elsewhere, Moscow sought to win a political role by negotiation that it could not win by force.³² It also hoped to divert American pressure away from Managua and devise a security regime that limited US opportunities for intervention against pro-Soviet or revolutionary Latin American regimes, provided they did not stimulate US fears by excessive revolutionary fervor.

More precisely, Moscow still sought to dismantle the Monroe Doctrine whose foundation in Washington's eyes remained the exclusion of Soviet influence over Latin America. The difference is that Moscow now sought these aims through a cooperative framework with regional security blocs, who were a stronger barrier to the US, and on the basis of the pursuit of traditional Realpolitik interests. The implications of this view gradually made themselves felt by 1987. Moscow's support for revolutionaries in Latin America gradually declined as it began to counsel its clients to support the peace program and peaceful political change rather than attempt to forcefully overthrow or organize to overthrow repressive or liberal governments.³³

A second consequence of new thinking's gradual triumph was Moscow's turnaround in support of the Contadora process and later the Arias plan. In effect Moscow came to see that far from being handmaidens of US policy in the region, Central and Latin American states could come together en bloc to impose a regional barrier of their own self-assertion against Washington. Hence, during 1986-88, Moscow revamped its policies to support these proposals enthusiastically, even as it poured its highest arms levels into Nicaragua.³⁴ The third consequence of this policy was that it allowed Moscow to continue to pour in those large quantities of military and other assistance to Managua and presumably the FMLN as long as the US refused to accept the Arias plan or other regional proposals for ending the conflict in Central America. Thus plans for high levels of arms aid, as testified to by Roger Miranda, continued through 1988 with the figures rising during 1985-88 for military transfers.³⁵ Indeed, the new Soviet position tied progress on resolving the regional conflicts to the cessation of US military assistance to the Contras, which was never more than a fraction of what Moscow and its allies channelled into Nicaragua.³⁶

One might ask why it took so long for Moscow to adopt a less belligerent policy in Central America as it deideologized its foreign policy, especially with regard to threatening vital American interests in an area clearly marginal to Soviet security interests? After all, if one compares Soviet interests there with those in the Middle East, the futility of pursuing adventurist policies in the Middle East, an infinitely more urgent region to Moscow, became clear even before this occurred in Nicaragua. The dangers in the Middle East were not only that Moscow might be dragged into conflict to defend its ally or client, Syria, but that war there might involve the regional belligerents and the superpowers in a war of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction.³⁷

Moreover, by 1987 prominent officials like Primakov could declare to a Western audience that Moscow had no class interests in the Middle East, only state interests, and obviously important ones at that.³⁸ Therefore, Soviet policy in 1987 visibly changed to counsel restraint, political solutions, downgraded arms transfers, improved relations with Israel, and superpower collaboration. If Soviet Near Eastern policy by 1987 was governed by such prudential considerations what held up progress on the much more marginal Nicaragua until 1989-90?

Soviet scholars who dealt with this question pointed to the coalition of old thinkers, Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Soviet military resistance to the change in policy, thereby validating Mikoyan's insight about a coalition of interest groups or lobbies who challenged *Perestroika* and the new thinking. According to Stanchenko, the "oldies" clung to traditional arguments that Reagan's policies were on the brink of failure and therefore opportunities for advances in Central and Latin America were promising; that Soviet involvement in the region was, in any case, insignificant, and in no way a threat to Washington; and that socialist allies should be assisted against imperialism. Stanchenko also notes that the very marginality, in relative terms, of this issue on the Soviet agenda (and by implication its crucial quality for both Managua, Havana, and those bureaucracies concerned with the issue) worked against a speedy superpower resolution of Nicaragua's civil war and its related issues.³⁹

Thus these forces relied upon traditional canons of Leninist thinking about the objective incompatibility of socialism and capitalism in the international arena, ie, a class and ideological approach that traditionally meant the victorious suppression of the conflict by force.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, the main channel for Cuban and probably Sandinista opposition to any settlement in Moscow was, according to Soviet specialists, the military and KGB.⁴¹ The multifaceted cooperation of these institutional forces with the Cuban military and the benefits gained thereof undoubtedly imparted a strong element of bureaucratic inertia to the support for continued high levels of militarization of the conflict. And the same undoubtedly held true for the ties with Nicaragua, inasmuch as a sizable military buildup was under way for Managua as well. Soviet analysts came to criticize the Sandinistas too for contributing (although they also admitted that they had little room for maneuver or alternative experience to appeal to) to the militarization and ideologization of the region and its evolution into a center of the Cold War.⁴²

But that fact hardly exhausts the reasons for the Sandinista obstruction of Soviet policy. Virtually every analyst, Soviet and American alike, concurred that Moscow did not aim to challenge directly American military power in the region and that in this sense its policy was to some degree cautious and adhered to "the rules of the game." The introduction of high-performance aircraft into the region was an American "line in the sand" that delimited one of the lines Moscow must not cross in this contest and Moscow knew it. Nonetheless, despite the fact that such aircraft were not needed for Managua's security, Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista government repeatedly pressed Moscow for such systems during 1983-87. In this campaign its tactics resembled those of Castro during the 1960s when he pressed Moscow to extend state of the art systems and/or deterrence to it.⁴³

Nicaragua's pestering of Moscow for systems that it had to know would touch off a major crisis and perhaps risk a war was by no means unique among Soviet clients. Not only was it reminiscent of Castro's importuning of Moscow, it also resembled Syria's efforts to commit Moscow more firmly to it in the Middle East. In both cases the net result of such commitments would be to surrender Soviet discretion and flexibility to an ally who pursued interests not wholly to Moscow's liking and which were likely to escalate regional tensions to the superpower level and perhaps even to higher levels of military conflict.

In the Middle East Syria, in 1982, couched its appeal for sophisticated air defense and missile systems against Israel in terms of a US plan to use Israel as a further springboard for aggression into Lebanon. The calculation was that nothing would so stimulate Moscow to send arms as the invocation of the US threat.⁴⁴ Syria's defense minister, Mustafa Tlas, in 1989 told an interviewer that war with Israel would be good for Syria because it would rupture the Soviet rapprochement with Israel and bring them closer to Damascus. When the interviewer asked if that is the case why did you not start the war, he replied that timing was "up to us to decide" and involved questions of preparedness. In other words, it was effective Israeli deterrence, backed up by US extended deterrence against Syria and the USSR that induced Syrian caution.⁴⁵ Similarly, Soviet analysts realized by 1985 that the transfer of advanced ballistic missile systems into the Middle East meant that the superpowers were losing control over events there and that the Reagan policy of globalizing regional tensions in such a situation threatened world peace.⁴⁶

The foregoing indicates that for Syria, the pursuit of strategic parity with Israel was just another word for the arms race and we may surmise that Nicaraguan requests for jet aircraft and weapons should be viewed comparably. Equally likely is the possibility that it was US deterrence of Managua, Havana, and Moscow that probably precluded further Sandinista offensives into neighboring countries during this time. The consequences of such invasions into Central American states, though perhaps beneficial to the revolutionary cause of the Sandinistas and Castro, were extremely ominous to Moscow, especially as its interests in such operations had to be much less than its concern over Middle Eastern developments. Thus, for Moscow in Central America it became ultimately a question of reasserting its pursuit of

Soviet national interests and not that of Managua or Havana just as was the case in the Middle East.⁴⁷ Once it became clear that the Bush Administration would abide by Nicaragua's election results and would not supply arms to the Contras and that the Arias plan provided an effective mechanism for conflict resolution and presumably safeguarding the Sandinistas, it became a desirable vehicle in Soviet eyes for restraining US interference with Managua and relieving itself of an issue that threatened Gorbachev's overriding interest in a detente with Washington.

This could not be said for Castro or the Sandinistas. They evidently felt impelled to push for "the revolution without borders" by aiding the FMLN offensive in El Salvador by shipping the rebels Soviet and bloc weapons in November 1989, shortly after Shevardnadze had left Managua and just before a Bush-Gorbachev summit. This probably was an attempt, similar in intent to the statements by Mustafa Tlas, to pressure Moscow into supporting its revolutionary offensive. However, it backfired and Moscow held to its stated intention to terminate arms shipments and accept the election's results. Castro was also decidedly cool toward the Arias plan. But here too he could not afford to attack Moscow's support so openly, since that would jeopardize his position with Gorbachev and prevent attainment of what had been his minimum aim, Sandinista possession of Nicaragua.⁴⁸

More to the point is the fact that Castro had to realize that settlement of the only regional conflict in Latin America would put his regime and its precarious economic position squarely on the agenda of Soviet-American relations and that he would not be able to exercise anything like his past influence on Soviet policy in Latin America. But these considerations did not deflect Moscow which had the power, thanks to arms transfers, to moderate its clients' behavior. In any case, all three states probably expected a clear Sandinista victory in the elections, an outcome which would have bought time, allowed for consolidation of the Sandinista regime, and for the possibility of a future advance.⁴⁹

Castro's concerns were magnified by the fact that in 1989-90, the full magnitude of the crisis in Soviet-Cuban economic relations became clear. Second, the campaign of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, which was reaching its climax within the USSR, threatened his domestic position. Indeed, these two phenomena were linked inasmuch as Soviet critics of Castro and foreign aid to Cuba were given something approaching a free hand to attack those subjects during 1989-90, to Cuba's acute discomfiture. Meanwhile, Castro's rejection of domestic reforms led Soviet officials and reformers to label him, in perhaps the most unkindest cut of all, an anachronism.

A clear example of the disjunction between Moscow and Havana in regard to regional conflicts in Central America was the two capitals' reaction to the FMLN offensive in late 1989. In a series of statements during 1989, Cuban officials had reiterated their support for the export of revolution, though Gorbachev explicitly disavowed the export of revolution and counter-revolution in his trip to Havana.

Thus, Gorbachev endorsed Primakov's 1988 line. When the FMLN offensive began Castro stated,

I believe the action that the Salvadoreans are presently carrying out is one of the most extraordinary feats ever — Look how those people can fight — They are showing imperialism that the people will continue fighting without caring about the euphoria that currently overcomes the imperialists.⁵⁰

Moscow's reaction, as expressed in Managua, was much different. European diplomatic reports from there indicated that the Soviet ambassador gathered Nicaraguan and Cuban officials on 28 November 1989, five days after President Bush blamed Moscow for supplying arms to Castro and eventually El Salvador, and "really read them the riot act."⁵¹ Clearly, Nicaraguan and Cuban assistance in intensifying the Central American crisis, in advance of the Nicaraguan election and in violation of the Arias plan and the recent accords with Washington to desist from military aid to the Contras, threatened to undo all of Moscow's hard-won achievements in negotiating with Washington and securing a role as a legitimate regional voice.

It is a measure of the importance of the detente with Washington and its pledge to respect Soviet security interests in Central America that Ambassador Nikolayenko's tirade to Cuban and Nicaraguan officials in November 1989, reversed a policy decision that had only been made in April. At that time Vadim Perfiliev, the first deputy head of the Information Administration of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ie, its press officer, stated that,

The Soviet Union thinks that Honduras' proposal, to link this issue (demobilization, repatriation, and movement of the Contras) to the demobilization of Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front detachments in El Salvador, which was supported by Costa Rica and El Salvador, contradicts the spirit and letter of the agreements reached at the latest meeting of Central American Presidents.⁵²

What appears to have prompted this reversal of policy was Moscow's success in securing Washington's pledge to abide by the election result in Nicaragua and its willingness to consider the USSR a real dialogue partner in Central America with regard to resolving conflicts there. These twin objectives weighed heavily in Soviet thinking on the region and in its goals for Soviet policy there.⁵³ Therefore, it is not surprising that Moscow was reported to be livid about the use of its weapons (surface-to-air missiles) in El Salvador and that it then pressured Ortega into accepting a reversal of the policy enunciated in April 1989.⁵⁴ And the Soviet rebuff to Managua was clearly a forceful one which finally persuaded the Sandinistas that their policy of deliberately antagonizing Washington to solidify Soviet commitment would not work. Moscow would pursue its aims in the region where the minimum goal of assuring Sandinista political power apparently had been won but was now jeopardized by a "frivolous" adventure.⁵⁵

Accordingly, Moscow pressured the Sandinistas from mid-1989 on to have a "clean" election even as it harvested the benefits of its newly created "detente with Washington in the area."⁵⁶ By the same token, US intervention in Panama at the end of 1989 was interpreted by some in Moscow as a warning of what might happen if the Sandinistas broke their pledges about the election or as a threat to intervene there.⁵⁷ While Moscow reassured Nicaragua of its support for the election and its outcome, this did not reassure Castro or the Sandinistas. Soviet transmissions apparently suggested that they strongly remonstrated with Moscow about its seeming acquiescence to or collusion with Washington.⁵⁸ Equally interesting is the possibility that Nicaraguan and Cuban attempts to face up to the pressure for domestic reform differed, with Castro purging his military and adopting a defiant attitude that did not go well with Nicaragua's leaders, who grudgingly but "publicly announced their commitment to economic reform, elections and believed that afterwards the United States would bail them out".⁵⁹

Cuba, Nicaragua, and Soviet conservatives felt menaced by the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe, Moscow's acceptance of them, and by the seemingly victorious tide of *Perestroika* in the USSR. Both states and their Soviet allies well knew that these events put the future of their states in some jeopardy as the growing press campaign against Castro and Soviet foreign aid to Cuba and Nicaragua indicated. Inasmuch as Soviet military and right-wing forces against reform counterattacked in 1990, the delivery of MiG-29 planes to Cuba, as a tangible sign of support for Castro, whose speeches since the Panama intervention betrayed a growing sense of threat and belligerency — indeed some would say paranoia — appears to have won support from Moscow.⁶⁰ However, those considerations applied to Cuban policy, a subject that became entangled in the domestic struggle for power and reform.⁶¹

By cooperating with Washington and accepting the results of the Nicaraguan election on 25 February 1990, Moscow secured its status as a regional participant in Central American security issues. American officials came to value Soviet involvement in Central America now that it no longer supported revolutionary violence there. This contrasted with Cuba's continuing support for the FMLN.⁶² Moscow also attributed its gains in Central and Latin America to participation in resolving the Central American wars. These claims were clearly intended to deny that Soviet Russia participated in these issues strictly on American sufferance. Nonetheless, Moscow visibly attributed its success in winning greater diplomatic recognition and opportunities for trade there to its cooperation with Washington. Unfortunately, because Gorbachev proved unable and unwilling to accept the need for substantial domestic reform, all these gains crumbled along with the Soviet Union in 1991. That domestic unwillingness to adapt to new realities and needs contradicted the previously adaptive Soviet policies in Latin America and elsewhere, and undid almost all of Moscow's former foreign policy positions, testified again to the interplay of domestic reform and successful foreign policy creativity.

In 1990-91 Soviet officials positively evaluated Latin American progress toward democratization, retreat of military governments from power, economic

integration, trade deals with the USSR, and support for Latin American conflict resolution or disarmament initiatives.⁶³ In general, Moscow wished to see these states cohere and find a greater place in world politics, precisely because they would then resist American influence and tend more toward a dialogue with Moscow as a counter-weight to Washington. Therefore, the USSR actively promoted those trends which corresponded with its real, as opposed to its ideological, interests.⁶⁴

The irony of this situation lays in the fact that just when Moscow secured the recognition it had always coveted in Central America, it lost the means of effectively utilizing that new-found influence. A cardinal point in the new thinking was that Moscow's real influence on world politics was exercised through the medium of its economic-political vitality. The galloping depression, political paralysis, and ultimate breakup of the empire in 1990-91 could hardly tempt Latin American states into qualitatively expanding commercial ties with the USSR or now Russia or into closer security relationships with Moscow. At the same time the ascendancy of the right wing in Soviet policy in 1990-91 also carried a disquieting message for Latin Americans.

First was a noticeable diminution of attacks on Cuban policy in the Soviet media. A trade deal for 1991 was signed and, though clearly the product of hard bargaining, it did temporarily stabilize the situation. In 1990-91 Soviet specialists toned down their attacks on Castroism and earnestly urged the United States to normalize relations with Cuba in order to defuse a potentially provocative situation. Thus Primakov, in February 1990, challenged Secretary of State Baker to abjure the use of force in Latin America, thereby easing Castro's fears, as the price of obtaining a change in Soviet policies towards Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua.⁶⁵

Cuba, meanwhile, unable to hide its fears, and never receiving such assurances from Washington, came under an internal state of what must be described as siege or preparation for war by Castro. Desperate economic conditions have led to what can only be called a process of deindustrialization that has continued well into the present (mid-1993). Castro's rhetoric has become more apocalyptic and militaristic. He has called Cuba the last trench of socialism and ended many speeches with the cry "socialism or death." More ominously, charges have been made that North Korea contracted with Cuba to export missiles and anti-air systems and to facilitate exchanges of chemical warfare technology.⁶⁶

Also in 1990-91, the temporary ascendancy of the right in Soviet politics strengthened Castro's position and led Soviet leaders like then Prime Minister Pavlov to invoke the desirability of copying Pinochet's model of martial law to restabilize the country. Soviet conservatives ominously employed the Latin American model for the USSR in a most pessimistic manner. One Soviet Latin Americanist then observed that modernization of the Soviet system was occurring under conditions that called to mind Peru and Colombia. Accordingly, dictatorship was not to be shunned if it provided a basis for meeting the real socioeconomic aspirations of people, or in Soviet terms, socialist justice and a more egalitarian income distribution. According to this scenario, Soviet conditions and Latin

American ones were not structurally dissimilar. And to prevent the breakup of the entire socio-political order authoritarian rule would be justified.⁶⁷

This turn in Soviet politics suggests that the manner in which Moscow related to the problems of conflict resolution in a Third World state at any time directly reflected its internal balance of forces. The instinct to copy Pinochet was also reflected in some Far Eastern specialists or elites' invocation of the repressive South Korean model of development under the generals of the 1970s and 1980s and reflected the thawing of ties with Seoul. We have suggested that the progress Moscow made in resolving these conflicts was directly tied to the outcome of its political struggles at home even if that is not the exclusive factor of analysis. This examination suggests that in an age when the new Russia confronts ethnic conflicts not altogether unlike those in Central America or Afghanistan, on its borders, that a key variable determining Russian policy toward conflict resolution will be the balance of forces inside the Russian government.

This analysis of past Soviet policies not only suggests that foreign policies are often the outcome of the domestic policy process and struggles. There also existed a complex series of institutional and political linkages between foreign and ruling Communist parties and the actors within the Soviet process, a relationship that Eastern Europe's participation in Soviet Third World policies made even more complex. One only need cite in that connection the role played by Walter Ulbricht in 1964 in unseating Khrushchev and in 1968 in instigating the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Any future history of Soviet policies in these conflicts might well give more consideration to these political linkages within the bloc as key factors of analysis. Gorbachev's policies toward Eastern Europe and the relationship of Moscow to those states in 1985-89 also provides an opportunity for analyzing those linkages. These linkages also supplied the secondary actors, Cuba and Nicaragua, with the effective means of influencing or even obstructing for some time Soviet policies that affected their vital interests which, in the final analysis, were relatively marginal ones to Moscow. Thus, Managua and Nicaragua were able to command a high level of military aid even when the policy was supposedly oriented against such transfers and public declarations of the termination of arms transfers had taken place.

Another factor that emerges from this analysis is the fact that Moscow's clients displayed a permanent tendency to try and bind Moscow more closely to them, to commit Moscow by pursuing what can only be called adventurist policies of spreading revolution and conflict into neighboring countries. This was true for Grenada, Nicaragua, and Cuba and certainly was also true for Vietnam, Syria, and North Korea. This fact suggests another line of analysis for historians of the Cold War and of Soviet policies, perhaps even a permanently operating principle of relationships among socialist states and their allies. Such policies inevitably intensified Cold War tensions, going back to the Korean War. By 1985 they had led to an entangling of regional tensions in Central America and elsewhere, with the escalating superpower conflict. More precisely, Moscow's clients' adventuristic

policies threatened to lead Moscow into further conflicts (Afghanistan could easily serve as another example) and Gorbachev's new thinking represented as much an attempt to reassert control over them as it was to ameliorate relations with Washington.

Finally, the chronicle of this process of conflict resolution suggests that US deterrent capability and willingness to fight back through proxies substantially limited the scope for militant action open to Moscow's clients and to the USSR during the 1980s. And the outcome of Operation DESERT STORM in 1990-91 reinforces this likelihood, despite the revolutionary changes in world affairs. One need not enter the American political debate about the wisdom of Reagan Administration policies to note that they did substantially raise the costs to Moscow of such intervention and constrain it from committing itself wholly to the Sandinistas' and Castro's adventurist policies. To say this is not to deny as well that Moscow at some level encouraged such actions. Rather, it is to point out that when the targets of such adventures banded together to retaliate by both political and military means, Soviet caution and willingness to sacrifice relatively marginal interests for the sake of its fundamental security manifested themselves. Thus the study and analysis of conflict resolution in Central America suggests insights not only into the history of Soviet policies in this region but in general, ie, for security policy making alignments and processes at home and for other conflicts.

Endnotes

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45. Ibid., p. 71.
46. Ibid., p. 127.
47. Ibid., pp. 112-20. An example of the risks run by Moscow occurred in 1987 when Syrian Defense Minister Tlas stated that Kosygin had guaranteed that Moscow would retaliate against any nuclear attack on it from Israel and in 1989 Tlas said that if Israel used nuclear weapons against Syria Moscow would provide Syria with atomic weapons. No matter how unrealistic such scenarios are operationally, they indicate the high level risks involved in regional conflicts, particularly this one. Ibid., pp. 161-62.
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